

### District of Columbia Public Schools, Office of Special Education: Private and Religious Office (PRO) Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

#### 1. What is the Private and Religious Office (PRO)?

The District of Columbia Public Schools' (DCPS) Private and Religious Office (referred to as "PRO") is the office that is responsible for locating, identifying, and evaluating all parentally-placed private school children ages 3 - 22 who have a disability or are suspected of having a disability and who are parentally-placed in a private elementary or secondary school located within the District of Columbia (DC).

#### 2. What is a private elementary or secondary school?

An elementary or secondary school is a nonprofit institutional day or residential school, including a public elementary or secondary charter school that provides elementary or secondary education (excluding education beyond grade 12), as determined by state law. The term "private school" means a school that is not under Federal or public supervision or control, which includes religious schools. A private elementary school includes child development centers that serve preschool and prekindergarten-aged children (ages 3 through 5 years and 10 months), according to DC's definition of elementary school.

#### 3. What is Child Find?

The process of locating parentally-placed private school children ages 3 - 22 who have a disability or are suspected of having a disability is commonly referred to as "Child Find." The PRO is responsible for Child Find for all children ages 3 - 22 who are located in the geographical boundaries of DC, regardless of whether they attend a private non-profit, private for-profit, public school, or a child development center that serves preschool and prekindergarten-aged children (3 years through 5 years and 10 months).

#### 4. How do I find information about the PRO?

The PRO will email or mail information about the PRO to whomever requests it.

PRO Website: [www.dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/PRO](http://www.dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/PRO)

By calling: (202) 698-8037

By emailing: [PRO@earlystagesdc.org](mailto:PRO@earlystagesdc.org)

#### 5. What can parents of parentally-placed private school children do when they believe their child needs special education services?

A parent can call the PRO if they wish to talk to someone immediately. A parent can also email the PRO or visit the PRO website to learn about more about the PRO, eligibility for special education, and equitable services.

#### 6. Does someone (a parent or someone else) need to submit information (or forms) to the PRO?

Yes. The first step is to refer a child by submitting a completed PRO Student Referral Form. The age of the child determines how someone (a parent or someone else) should refer a child:

For children 3 years through 5 years and 10 months: Refer a child to Early Stages [[www.earlystagesdc.org](http://www.earlystagesdc.org)], a DCPS diagnostic center that serves children ages 3 through 5 years and 10 months.

*NOTE: If a child who is 3 years old through 5 years and 10 months is referred to the PRO, the PRO will coordinate with Early Stages, who will work with the family and their child.*

For children 5 years and 11 months to 22 years old: Refer a child to the PRO [[www.dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/PRO](http://www.dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/PRO)]. After a child has been referred, a parent must submit the following required PRO forms (these required PRO forms must be resubmitted each school year):

- DCPS Annual Student Enrollment Form
- DC Universal Health Certificate [two pages]

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- Proof of DC residency [see the DCPS Residency Verification Guidelines], if necessary
- Proof of the child's age
- Proof of enrollment in a private school that is located in DC

### 7. Can a private school teacher of a parentally-placed private school child refer a child?

Yes. A parent, teacher, headmaster/principal, or someone else who knows the child may refer a child – but in order for the PRO to proceed with a referral made by someone other than a parent, the PRO will need the parent's signed consent.

### 8. If a parent doesn't live in DC but sends their child to a private school that is located in DC, is their child eligible to be served by the PRO?

Yes.

### 9. If a parent lives in DC but sends their child to a private school that is located outside of DC, is their child eligible to be served by the PRO?

The school district ("district") in which a child resides is responsible for ensuring FAPE is available. The District where a child resides is responsible for making FAPE available to parentally-placed children with disabilities who attend a private school unless the parent makes clear his or her intent to keep the child enrolled in the private school. If a determination is made through the child find process by the district where the private school is located that a child is eligible for special education and a parent makes clear his/her intent to keep the child enrolled in the private school, the district where the child resides is not required to make FAPE available. However, if a parent chooses to accept the offer of FAPE and enroll the child in a public school, then the district where the child resides is obligated to make FAPE available.

The district in which the private school is located is responsible for providing services to parentally-placed children. To see what services their child is eligible for, a parent should contact the district in which the private school that their child attends is located.

### 10. Where do parentally-placed private school children with disabilities receive evaluations and equitable services?

The location is different for children depending on their age:

Children 3 years through 5 years and 10 months: the evaluation and eligibility meeting will be managed by Early Stages [[www.earlystagesdc.org/](http://www.earlystagesdc.org/)]. If the parent declines the Individualized education program (IEP) and site for services in a DCPS local school, and accepts the Individual service plan (ISP), the equitable services will generally be provided at the DCPS local school.

Children 5 years and 11 months to 22 years old: The eligibility meeting, Individual service plan (ISP) meeting, and equitable services will be managed by the PRO [[www.dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/PRO](http://www.dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/PRO)] and will generally be provided at the DCPS local school.

*The DCPS local school could be the DCPS school closest to either (1) the parent's residence or (2) the private school in which the child is enrolled.*

### 11. How long does it take to find out if a child is eligible for special education and services?

Though the time varies, eligibility must be determined within the timeline of 120 days from the referral date (informed written parental consent on the required LEA form must be given for the timeline to start). Informed written parental consent is obtained when the parent/guardian signs the PRO Referral Form and submits the form, with the signature, to the PRO. A PRO Referral Form that is not submitted with a signature will not start the 120 day timeline.

### 12. If a child is found eligible for special education and the parent accepts the ISP and equitable services, how long will they receive these services for?

A child who is found eligible for special education and accepts the ISP and equitable services will receive those services for at least the school year in which the child's ISP was written and implemented. Once a new school year begins, the parent will need to resubmit the required PRO forms in order for their child to continue to receive equitable services.

Every year, the parent will be asked if they want their child's ISP and equitable services to be reviewed and updated.

Every three years, the parent will be asked if they want their child to be re-evaluated to determine if s/he still has a disability and continues to be eligible for special education and receive equitable services.

### **13. Can consent for evaluations be withdrawn before testing is completed and restarted at a later date?**

Yes. Consent can be withdrawn at any time. When consent for evaluation is withdrawn, the PRO will close the case and retain a file of any assessments completed up to the point of the withdrawal. A parent is welcome to re-engage with the PRO at any point in the future, though the parent will have to re-submit the required PRO forms. Once consent is withdrawn, the 120-day timeline to complete the eligibility process starts over.

### **14. Will DCPS staff be sent to the private school to do the eligibility and/or ISP meeting?**

Generally, no. The evaluation meeting will be held at Early Stages (for children who are 3 years through 5 years and 10 months) or (for children 5 years and 11 months to 22 years old) the child's neighborhood DCPS local school or the DCPS local school that is closest to the child's private school depending on the child's age. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of DCPS.

### **15. What happens when my child is deemed eligible for special education?**

For children who are 3 years through 5 years and 10 months: The parent will be offered an IEP and offered a placement in a DCPS local school. The parent may choose to accept the IEP and placement and choose to enroll their child in a DCPS local school or the parent may decline this offer. If the parent declines this offer, the parent will then be offered an ISP and equitable services.

If a parent chooses to decline both the IEP and placement and the ISP and equitable services, the parent may re-submit the required PRO forms anytime in the future should they want to have their child re-evaluated to determine eligibility for special education (and associated services).

For children who are 5 years and 11 months to 22 years old: The parent will be offered an ISP. The parent may choose to decline the ISP. If the ISP has been declined, the parent may request to enroll their child in a DCPS local school and receive an IEP (and receive the full services that a DCPS student would be offered) or the parent may choose to not to enroll their child and the case would be closed. If a parent declines the ISP and does not wish to enroll their child in a DCPS local school – their child would not be eligible for equitable services and the case would be closed.

If a parent chooses to decline the ISP and equitable services and chooses not to enroll their child in a DCPS local school, the parent may re-submit the required PRO forms anytime in the future should they want to have their child re-evaluated to determine eligibility for special education and equitable services.

### **16. What services are available to a parentally-placed private school child with a disability?**

DCPS will provide the following "equitable services" for parentally-placed private school children with disabilities who are determined to be eligible for special education by DCPS and have accepted the ISP:

- All students who qualify for speech/language services: up to one hour per week of speech/language services;
- All students 5 years and 11 months and older who qualify for occupational therapy: up to 2 school-based consultations per school year for consultative occupational therapy;
- For children prior to 5 years and 11 months who qualify for occupational therapy: up to one hour per week of occupational therapy;

- For children prior to 5 years and 11 months who qualify for physical therapy: up to one hour per week of physical therapy;
- One full-time special education teacher who will provide support to private elementary and secondary school (which includes child development centers) administrators and staff including:
  - For students in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and above (based on availability): professional development opportunities in regards to Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) or Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) implementation; &
  - For all students (based on availability): coaching for differentiated instruction and behavioral supports.

These services are also detailed in the PRO Statement of Services Agreement (available on the PRO website).

**17. If a child qualifies for equitable services, can the equitable services (for example, speech and language therapy) be provided at the child's private school?**

Generally, services will be provided at the DCPS local school that is located the nearest to the private school in which the child is enrolled or the DCPS local school that is closest to the parent's residence (in DC). Exceptions may be made at the discretion of DCPS.

**18. What is the difference between an IEP (Individualized education program) and an ISP (Individual service plan)?**

An IEP is a written statement that specifies the individual needs of a child with a disability and what special education and related services are necessary to meet those needs. The services in the IEP are provided in a public school. (DCPS uses the same definition for IEP that P.L. 108-466 provides. The full definition of IEP can be found in P.L. 108-466 Sec. 614(d).)

An ISP is a written statement that specifies for a parentally-placed private school child with a disability the equitable services for which the child qualifies, including the location of the equitable services. (DCPS uses the same definition for ISP that §300.37 provides for "Services plan." The full definition of "Services plan" can be found in §300.37).

**19. Can a parentally-placed private school child with a disability receive the same amount of special education services through an ISP as s/he would receive through an IEP?**

No. A parentally-placed private school child with a disability is not entitled to receive some or all of the special education and related services that the student would receive if enrolled in a DPCS local school.

**20. If a parentally-placed private school child is determined to be eligible for special education by DPCS and the parent rejects the equitable services offered through the ISP, what is the process if the parent requests this support at a later time?**

A parent may re-engage with the PRO at any point in the future, though the required PRO forms would need to be re-submitted. Once consent is withdrawn, the 120-day timeline to complete the eligibility process starts over.

**21. Who is responsible for conducting the annual review and triennial reevaluation and managing equitable services for a parentally-placed private school child with a disability who has accepted an ISP?**

The PRO is responsible for ensuring that parents of parentally-placed private school children who have been found eligible for special education and who have accepted an ISP are offered the opportunity to (1) have their child's ISP reviewed and updated once a year and (2) have their child reevaluated (to determine eligibility and, if eligible, the appropriate equitable services) every three years. In order for the PRO to review and update a child's ISP or reevaluate the child, a parent must submit the required PRO forms at the beginning of each school year (see the PRO website for a list of these forms).

**22. Are home-schooled children considered parentally-placed private school children?**

No.